



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

M. JODI RELL
GOVERNOR

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MEDIA CONTACTS: David Dearborn
860-524-7313; david.dearborn@ct.gov;
Linda Piotrowicz, CT Dept. of Agriculture,
860-713-2558; Linda.piotrowicz@po.state.ct.us

Governor Rell Requests Federal Disaster Relief For Connecticut's Crop Losses After Heavy Rains

Governor M. Jodi Rell is asking U.S. Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns to approve federal disaster aid for Connecticut farmers who suffered severe crop losses from the heavy rains and cool temperatures this spring and early summer.

"Farmers throughout the state have been hit hard by torrential rains and unseasonably cool weather," Governor Rell said. "The losses in crop production have been devastating – over 70% in some cases. My request to Secretary Johanns covers all eight Connecticut counties for production losses, meaning that farmers statewide would be eligible for low-interest emergency federal recovery loans.

"Our farmers are being forced to spend an enormous amount of money and effort to produce their crops this year," the Governor said. "This disaster relief funding would allow them to continue to produce healthful, reasonably priced, local food for the public and, at the same time, help maintain the \$2.2 billion contributed annually by agriculture to our state's economy. I am hopeful that Secretary Johanns will grant my request fully and expeditiously."

The USDA Secretary approved previous requests by Governor Rell for disaster relief for Connecticut farmers in March 2005 and February 2006, for wet weather and drought, respectively. Emergency loan assistance was approved in both declarations. State farmers also were eligible for financial relief after the storms and floods of October 2005. Governor Rell requested a Presidential disaster declaration that made available low-interest loans and USDA Farm Service Agency emergency conservation funding for farmland rehabilitation.

According to data gathered by Farm Service Agency personnel for the period April 1 through July 16, 2006, Connecticut farmers sustained production losses ranging from 40 percent to more than 70 percent for some crops -- including hay, livestock feed corn, sweet corn, strawberries, and pumpkins.

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STATE CAPITOL, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106
TEL: (860) 566-4840, FAX: (860) 524-7396
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Cushman Farms in Franklin, for example, was forced to replant over 100 of their 830 acres of feed corn, due to crop failures experienced early in the season, reports the state Department of Agriculture. Owner Nate Cushman predicts that he will have to buy corn from an outside vendor to feed his dairy cattle, adding considerable expense to his already-soaring production costs.

“Mr. Cushman’s hay crop fared even worse,” said Agriculture Commissioner F. Philip Prelli. “Normally, he would be making his second cutting at this time of year, but he is still struggling to complete his first. The consecutive precipitation-free days required to dry the hay have been all too scarce. The quality of the hay he has managed to harvest has been poor, forcing him to purchase costly supplements for his cows’ feed in order to provide the nutritious diet needed for milk production.”

Paul Peters of Pumpkin Paul in Tolland had a booming strawberry crop this spring, but the rainy weather kept his pick-your-own customers away. As a result, many of his berries spoiled while still on the plants, and he had to hire extra help to pick and dispose of the rotten fruit.

“Hopes that the fall pumpkin crop will help recoup some of Mr. Peters’ financial losses are dwindling,” Commissioner Prelli said. “Eight of the 22 acres he planted with pumpkin seed failed to germinate, and the fields were so wet that he could not get into them to replant. Even if his fields dry out enough to work, the window of opportunity is lost; there is virtually zero demand for pumpkins that mature after Halloween.”

Commissioner Prelli expects to see yield reductions in other crops due to the severely wet weather conditions, but reports that damage cannot be fully assessed until later into the growing season.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service Agency, along with sister agencies located in USDA service center areas, is charged with reviewing crops impacted by weather and determining if a request for disaster relief is in order. Generally, requests are triggered by one or more crops suffering a weather-related production loss of 30 percent or greater in a season. Agency personnel found that the losses for Connecticut’s hay, corn, strawberries, and pumpkins exceeded that threshold and, in some cases, were more than double that figure.

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